

POPULAR LITERATURE, TRANSLATION AND INTERROGATING POST-COLONIAL INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This work is a perspectival analysis of translated popular literature in post-colonial India. Popular literature serves useful functions in that it seeks to fulfill an intellectual and cultural vacuum in the minds of a vast mass of our populace who seem to have barely benefited by the educational structure existing in the country. However, the past fifty years reveals unmistakable signs of a sense of inertia and casualness afflicting such author's choice of works and the manner of presentation to the reading public.

The object of this paper is to bring into analytical focus, the role, expanse and prospects of local Kannada writers like Bhairappa, Girish Karnad, etc. vis a vis the innumerable anonymous authors whose works infiltrate the streets.

The authors discuss the poetic and politics of popular literature and the type of readership that patronizes it. The middle ground between these two categories of writers is occupied by the 'elite' literature of the Shobha De type, whose works have been canonized and yet which seems merely opportunistic.

KEYWORDS: Popular Literature, Translation Studies, Post Colonialism, Distorted Hegemony, Dualism, Post Modernism, Holism

INTRODUCTION

Post colonial India came with many perils to civilized society: Ignorance, distorted vision, need to make quick gains and impressions, quick intellectual justification of a counter culture, poverty of means for livelihood and ideas. The Intellectual class therefore had an unenviable agenda before them: to put the ship of new India on a benign, value oriented, questioning mind with 'right' intellectual and spiritual motives. The impossibility of Balanced growth across all sectors, regions and classes of people due to paucity of resources in new India gave rise to a distorted economic and therefore social development. Therefore the deprived and the underprivileged with easy access to spurious and cheap literature and a propensity to develop a quick counterculture brought an additional responsibility to the thinking class, i.e. to make available materially and psychologically 'factual' literature that attempted to connect with this 'deprived audience' thereby making education and knowledge available in a way that provided insight into right values for a transitional society.

Thus the 'space' was historically and perhaps 'rightly' was taken up by the writers of fiction and folklore: to relate, connect and communicate to the masses, to help them to transcend the limitations of thought as much as it would pave the way for their own self realization. So the inevitable question occurs whether such a transformation in the intellectual landscape of post colonial Indian reader-ship taken place. This paper tries to assess the role of popular literature and where it locates itself and therefore point out the need for and tap the 'sources' of an imperative transformation.

The authors point to a deteriorating trend in the quality and quantity of both authorship and readership and opine that this state of affairs is rooted in a distorted socio-economic, educational structure that has come to exist in this country

since independence. Then they search for a solution to this state of affairs and come out with the view: that the problem has to be tackled from diverse angles of educating the authors, translators and the readers along with calling for a kind of macro reformation of the socio-economic and educational structures.

Nature of Existential Translation Studies in Popular Literature and its Causal Implications

Works of translation have the force of history in as much as it seeks to bind heterogeneous cultures across the world and points out the unifying elements and trends in the reader's conscious and sub-conscious mind levels. True translation aids and abets the process of education in its ideal function of developing praxis of the whole in the learner. Education being holistic in nature was expected to fulfill this role. The post-1947 India was not short of expectations in this regard. Our endeavor in this paper is to provide a perspectival account of the role of popular literature in the post-colonial India as far as some translated works are concerned.

There are various categories and degrees of popular literature. Popular literature in the broadest sense of the term includes Indian mythological categories to popular science literature and fiction as also novels and writing catering to diverse tastes. In fact, popular literature seems to define popular culture and both affect it and is affected by it. We focus on a specific variety of popular literature which does not elevate reader's taste and consciousness but is merely escapist in its bearings. Our contention is that such state of affairs in the post-colonial context is a cancerous outgrowth of a distorted hegemonic outlook on the part of our leaders and intellectuals. So the role and problem of translated popular literature in post-colonial India is discussed here. The relevance of this paper must be seen in the context of dualistic socio-economic India life and not sufficiently integrated into the mainstream educated society. Much of the masses remain educationally backward though their impulse to see their children educated remains strong.

The post-colonial industrialization process has served to aggravate the dividing line between the haves and have-nots. Many writers and scholars of merit have produced meaningful literature to reach out to the common mass. Literatures and litterateurs were engaged in the democratizing process of the modernization project i.e. the works or contents engaged themselves in collective destinies of people with deployment of popular speech and folk traditions at the level of form.

However, the socio-economic struggle of a newly industrializing country produced its own class of victims. With large masses of people bereft of any educational exposure worth the name, greater and increasing number of drop-outs in lower stratas of society, greater number of drop-outs among girls from primary and secondary levels of education as an outcome of gender discrimination as a way of life in traditional India, etc. manifested a crisis in consciousness and values seen in the rise 'hippism' counter-culture of 1960s resulting in impoverishment of the intellect and value-subtractions in national economic output with consequent deprivation of poorer people to any access to a saner way of life. All this produced a cultural vacuum in lives of vast chunks of people that was invaded and monopolized by the creators of 'kitsch' literature and popular cinemas.

Ezra Pound had reflected that most literary movements were presided by translations from English that itself was an outcome of colonial experience. Tejaswini Niranjana's observation on Jones attitudes and work marks this hegemonic trait which sought to rule over Indian minds. K. Sachidanandan's Survey of Post 1947 regional literature also points to a lack of ideas rooted in our historical pre-colonial context. In the field of literature there came into existence the idea of an 'elite' literature as the critics increasingly saw the relevance/irrelevance of writings by such eminent writers in diverse linguistic regions, such as, Girish Karnad, Gopal Krishna Adiga, Dilip Chitra, etc. as such writers were inaccessible to the

common masses. These writers sensing the ‘impossibility’ of providing for an effective literary educational base to the deprived sections, sought to justify the counter –culture and the type of popular literature it spawned.

The noted French thinker, Pierre Bourdier, in his eagerness to study cultural patterns across anthropological space had justified the existence of culture/counter-culture (meaning ideological set of practices) as a necessary political force. Despite the degree of legitimacy of political analyses from a purely cultural –spiritual standpoint we see the irrelevance of it as the regressive elements in such a movement erode away their future politically and the possibility of growth towards a more universal harmonizing mode of existence. Even Rahamat Tasikare’s. ‘Mardolagina kichhu-Partisamksiti’ betrayed a lack of perspective. Among the authors’ studied, U. R. Anathamurthy and J. Krishnamrthy realized the futility of the ‘writers’ rebellion’ which leads to a blind alley even after the groups in questions extract some economic and political mileage. It is a common phenomena that diversions, and what is called hierarchy within hierarchy’ develop soon after a political change-over because politics becomes an all pervading feature of their ‘way of life’.

The progress of popular literature from colonial times, down through the post-colonial till date manifests similar characteristics of ‘erotiasm’, use of woman image as commodity, objects, escapism, violence, lack of plots less rooted in a socio-eco-political order. Even though the causes leading to their effects/characteristics are traced across the chasms and miasma of multiple unsolved aspirations of multi and hierarchical old order ‘apparently’ trying to jell with the new what is noticed in the same movement is perpetual and ‘repeatable’ mistakes of short sightedness, lack of intellectual discipline, application and lack of motive for creative transmission for retracement of values.. It seems a far more grievous sin in case of post –colonial writers who in the context of post colonial India with its developmental and re-culturalisation for national priorities sought to focus on ‘impressionism’ and ‘fast’ readership without desire to help in redevelopment of vision for reflection on national and world economic and cultural agenda and so to serve readership better.

It is foolish to decry popular literature of all types which in many instances brings education closer to the public as in popular science writings and its regional transactions. But the trend of many works’ translations especially from the western style’ hegemonic’ writings pandered to base tastes for easy money as those translation which were not true transmitters of authors’ intentionalities. For a country with heterogeneities like India and the peculiarities of regional cultures within a transmission and migratory processes for social living, it was a cause for concern.

There were popular writers of ‘Kitsch’ variety which have a popular appeal and read by educated masses in schools and colleges and that legitimized slanderous language, thought forms and works of arts in the name of expression. The literature of Sobha De’s expressionistic type have been canonized by Mumbai University & whose work is part of its syllabi. To take her example: her books build up a ‘sub-mind’ of a metropolitan urban middle class consumerist set devoid of moorings, responsibilities and therefore ‘opportunities’. Her narration is sensuously graphic, reminiscent of metro night club or a pub culture. The lives of protagonists are characterized by superficiality and inane –ness and the mention of her novel play lightly with values of family solidarity. While she underplays the importance of values in her quest, there is increasing suspicion on part of readers of her deliberate attempt to subtly highlight the legitimacy of a counter culture.

Many of writers of popular literature like Girish Karnad and Bhairappa have not really done justice to their capability about changing the perception of mass-consciousness as regards the sense of existential reality. While Bhairappa’s work betray a desire to stick to the beaten path of upholding traditional modes of patriarchal values and such other exploitative modes, Girish Karnad’s Nagamandala seeming ‘Barbario’ (the idea of snake mythically transforming into a man and making love to a woman, and such other imageries passing in the name of folklore) keeps his readers in the traditional state of ignorance and superstition. Similar authors take characters from local population or folklore past and

fortify their tradition: or their contemporariness and relevance merely extends to some sections of society without seeing the problems in a wider perspective or inter-cultural setting which could have given the readers a sense of history or an understanding of social forces in operation and transition.

Another category of translated works refer to popular pulp fictions of the West which has a massive circulation in its Hindi edition. ex: Jones Hadley Chase, Harold Robbins, Sidney Sheldon, Eric Stanley Gardner, Roses Macdonald, etc. Either the themes are not so elevating or in some cases where they have a plot, it begs the question as why our translations leave the market free for pulp products.

Again the danger of popular literature lies as much with the authors' intentions and attitudes as much with the diverse 'types' of readership. The college students addicted to these types of literature develop wartime sensitivity and the newly emerging nouveau-rich living in islands of prosperity and aspiring for leadership position serve to perpetuate the hegemonistic structures, already existing and continuing from the colonial mind-set.

Power seems to an important means and end – product for perpetuations of cultural hegemony. The network of this hegemonistic culture is seen in TVs, satellite transmissions, press and advertisement and its living symbols of vast mass of cultural workers. Not that the movement of modernization does not create change. It does, but as Gramsci says this cultural hegemony is maintained, justified and sanctified. In any culture that accommodates people to their social facts, so long as it is not threatening to ruling class interest brings about a 'statist' civilization incapable of innovative and holistic, enveloping and progressive movements (Gramsci in 'Power and Culture').

Even post –modernism seems to support this movement/stagnancy in counter-culture. Post –modernism posited as a rational counter to the ills of modernism, such as elitism, authoritarianism and hegemonic ways of thinking ends up in supporting movements of popular culture and popular literature as escape-routes from the phenomena of cultural hegemony. Post-modernism thus in its analytic –deconstructionist approach to understanding also tend to suffer from a lack of holistic and integrated approach. Unless it sees this, it cannot fulfill the modernism project of universalisation of values and a universalistic discourse even while understanding it in a region-specific, history- specific context.

The Way Out

Our contention is that while popular literature in its translated version is subversive of refined tastes and contrary to any spiritualistically rational balanced culture lead to a way of life degrading in morals, intellectual skills and art form serving to perpetuate this existing socio-eco-iniquitous order. It strengthens the allusion/'illusion' of the division of society into the 'cultural haves' and 'cultural untouchables or have-nots'. We see the way out of this sort of existential problem in the revolution in educational thinking and consequent reformation of the socio-eco order. Education must reorder its priorities. While dissemination of technological education is necessary for a balanced and prosperous world, it has almost an equi-proportionate potential to subvert the sense of balance of power and equitable order unless backed by proper liberal education that highlights inter-linkage of disciplines at college level in a detailed academic way with enlightened teachership who while engaging in a process of realization uphold the 'dialogic' process of imparting education.

Paulo Freire did commendable work by bringing in the variable of 'oppression' in model of educational theory and said that educational theories must uphold the oppressor-oppressed duality as a fact of life to transcend it. Educators have the burden of humanity pressing upon them. The noted educator, J. Krishnamurthy, in *Education and significance of life*, 1992, p.4, writes that if we are being educated only to be a scientist, or a scholar wedded to books, or specialists addicted to knowledge, then we shall be contributing to the destruction and misery of the world. In page 11, he writes, 'as long as education does not cultivate an integrated outlook of life, it has a very little significance Again, in p.14 he writes

‘education is not merely acquiring knowledge, gathering and correlating facts; it is to see the significance of life as a whole. But then the whole cannot be approached through the parts– which is what governments, organized religious groups, voluntary action groups and political parties are attempting to do.

The educationists while developing this holistic outlook to life must develop a ‘dialogic’ relationship to books and people. When the authors queried Prof. Kedarnath Singh in the course of an interview as regards problem of literature, he said, ‘we do not know how to relate to the masses’. We did not probe further but retrospectively realized that the problem was that such writers and intellectuals tried to find solutions from their own experience. To see from the problematic of the people/consumer themselves that the popular culture itself is an outcome of the problematic of the masses; the problematic relating to the economic –social psychological – political, technological market orientation; then immediately communication is established. This has been the experience of poets and writers during our national freedoms struggle which helped to keep the discontent of the masses alive. The medieval saint-poets like Kabir, Tulsidas, Basavanna had no problem of communication with the people; and though the societies of present times differ markedly from the earlier ones, the importance of such an attitude cannot be under played. Such an appeal is also hinted by Gramsci in Italian context. Njabula S. Ndebule, the South African literary figure in his approach to the problems in assessing popular literature and role of writers in society, states that our writers must constantly reassess their level of understanding of society. Secondly, they must enhance their understanding of the nature of their art and its medium of language. Finally, they must take an interest in the spread of literacy in the working class community. Lastly, their definition of what constitutes politics must be inclusive of all peoples. Only in this way, can literature, the art of the written world, take its rightful place in the development of a progressive culture. (Ngabulo Ndebele, 1994, p. 94).

This sort of educational momentum must find its external reflection in bringing about a just socio-eco-political order in a humanistic post industrialized society wherein oppression is minimized. This has the potential of serving as an effective antidote for curbing the deterioration of standards of popular literature and making the so-called ‘elite’ literature popular.

CONCLUSIONS

Post Colonial industrial India aggravated the dividing line between the haves and have-nots. Discrimination and deprivation of education across strata of people served to erode the sense of existential values. ‘Elite’ writers sensing the helplessness of the education scenario, justified popular literature. But Ananthamurthy and Krishnamurti realized the ‘futility of the writers’ rebellion’. While it would be foolish to deny all popular literature, this paper alleges that many writers did not do justice to their capabilities to change mass perception.

Post modernism, without any holistic basis, cannot bridge gaps in the universalistic project of modernism. The way out is a revolution in educational thinking and reformation in the socio economic order. Paulo Friere had highlighted the need to uphold the oppressor-oppressed model in education to overcome it. Educationists then need to develop a ‘dialogic approach to life’. To understand that popular cults are an outcome of the problem of the masses, a necessary concomitant of ‘dialogue with masses’ is established. Ndebele (1994) therefore wants writers to constantly reassess their sense of understanding of societies in which they live.

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